

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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In Reply Refer to:
4100(932) P

April 19, 2002

EMS TRANSMISSION: 04/25/02
Instruction Memorandum No. AZ-2002-025
Expires: 9/30/03

To: Field Managers

From: State Director

Subject: Arizona Drought Strategy

DD: 6/30/02

Purpose: Livestock grazing program guidance for statewide, consistent response to severe drought conditions

Background: Most areas within the state experienced a dry summer last year followed by dry winter and spring. Precipitation for the past five months was less than 50% of normal. The outlook for the summer monsoon season is uncertain. However, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Climate Prediction Center expects dry and warmer weather to prevail over the next several months and for the drought to expand across the entire state by May. Consequently, water sources are limited, and vegetation continues to be stressed. In addition, record dry fuels have led to an early fire season. Effective March 24, the Southwestern Area moved into Preparedness Level III. This indicates a high fire danger which could lead to additional impacts to rangeland resources.

Given these drought conditions, we need to consider the short-term and long-term health and productivity of the rangelands and the hardships imposed on the livestock permittees and lessees. We must do all we can to mitigate economic hardships to livestock operators while still protecting the long-term productivity of the rangelands. Everyone will benefit from a proactive approach. Further guidance is provided in W.O. IM No. 2002-120.

Most Field Offices already have contacted permittees to discuss the drought conditions.

Policy/Action: When drought conditions surpass vegetation tolerance thresholds, such as soil moisture availability and physiological processes, we must discuss possible allotment use modifications with the permittees. Field Offices will first work with permittees to voluntarily reduce livestock numbers, or temporarily close portions or entire allotments to grazing use.

Historically, most livestock operators impacted by drought conditions on public lands in Arizona have voluntarily reduced their numbers without issuance of formal livestock closure notices. However, if drought conditions persist, formal range closures may be necessary per 43 CFR 4110.3-3(b). Field Offices will coordinate with the State Office prior to issuance of any formal livestock closure notices.

All formal closure determinations should be supported by documented findings about current or expected drought impacts. Attachment (1) contains a drought indicator form for a rapid assessment of drought conditions, and attachment (2) shows the various phenological stages for deciduous trees, shrubs, grasses and forbs. These are the minimum indicators that must be evaluated using the attached Drought Indicator Checklist and completed prior to modification of allotment grazing use. We cannot complete a drought assessment for every allotment, so we recommend that each Field Office develop an allotment monitoring priority list for completing drought assessments. Prioritization criteria should include whether permittees and lessees have reduced numbers already and whether other resources will be stressed from continued grazing use.

Attachment (3) contains points of discussion to consider when contacting affected permittees and lessees, the public, and State and Federal Agencies regarding this Arizona BLM Drought Strategy.

Time frame: Effective immediately

Manual/Handbook Sections Affected: 4110

Contact: This Instruction Memorandum was coordinated with all Arizona BLM offices. If you have any questions about the above policy, you may contact Bill Coulloudon at 602-417-9439.

SIGNED BY:
Lonna O'Neal
Acting State Director

AUTHENTICATED BY:
Karen Babb
Staff Assitant

Attachments:

1. Drought Indicator Checklist (1 p.)
2. Plant Phenology Stages (1 p.)
3. Points of Discussion (1 p.)

DROUGHT INDICATOR CHECKLIST	
Name of Allotment	<div></div> <div></div>
Use Area/Pasture	<div></div>
Name of Observer	<div></div>
Date	<div></div>

<u>INDICATOR</u>	<u>OBSERVATION</u>
Forage Vigor (Does plant height, leaf length and color indicate strong vigor?)	below avg. _____ average _____ above avg. _____
Does leader growth of shrubs indicate strong vigor?	below avg. _____ average _____ above avg. _____
What is the average height of current years' herbaceous growth?	_____ inches
Are leaves of deciduous shrubs lost or dead?	
Phenological stages of key species in plant community? (Refer to attached Plant Phenology Stages Table)	below avg. _____ average _____ above avg. _____ _____ _____
Utilization of previous years' growth (if possible)	_____
Soil Moisture Depth	_____
Rainfall for Current Year	_____ inches
Recommendations for Allotment Closure or Alternative Management Practices	below normal _____ normal _____ _____ _____ _____
Other Comments:	

PLANT PHENOLOGY STAGES		
Trees & Shrubs (deciduous)	Grasses	Forbs
Dormant	Dormant	Dormant
Leaf Growth Starts	Growth Starts	Growth Starts

Twig Growth	½ Vegetative Growth	Flower Stalks Appear
Flower Buds First Visible	Flower Stalks Appear	First Bloom
Leaves Full Grown	Heads Out Fully	Full Bloom (3/4 Blossom)
First Bloom (3/4 Bloom)	Dough Seed Set	Seeds Ripe (3/4 Dry)
Bloom Over	Hard Seeds	Dissemination
Seed Ripe	Dissemination	Plants Begin to Dry
Dissemination	Plants Begin to Dry	Plants Dry, Summer, Fall
Leaves Turn Yellow or Brown	Plants Dry, Summer, Fall	
Leaves Dry & Begin to Drop		

Points of Discussion to Include in Contacts “with the interested public” or “with interested parties and affected permittees and lessees regarding Arizona Drought Strategy.

1. Due to extremely dry conditions we suspect an Emergency Drought Situation in _____ County.
2. We have established a Drought Monitoring Priority List for the purpose of conducting allotment inspections and drought documentation. (Attached)
3. The priority list was based on factors to include:
 - a. Known field conditions observed while conducting other field work.
 - __b. Riparian Areas.
 - c. Known Threaten and Endangered Species Habitat.
 - d. Allotments with significant numbers of livestock turned out.
4. We will begin conducting allotment inspections for the purpose of determining the extent of drought conditions on April 1, 2002. From April 1 through May 30, 2002, we will be conducting allotment inspections based on the Drought Monitoring Priority List. Inspections will need to be completed quickly due to the potential emergency nature of the situation.
5. Drought conditions will be evaluated based on the criteria in the Drought Indicator Checklist (Attached)
6. We are contacting the affected permittee and any other interested parties to notify them of:
 - a. The drought situation.
 - b. Our strategy in dealing with the situation.
 - c. To provide them an opportunity for participation in the process.
 - d. Ideally, Drought Assessments should be conducted by an interdisciplinary team. The amount or time frame for consultation with all interested parties will be based on the imminent likelihood of significant resource damage. See 43CFR 4110.3-3(b).
7. Due to the Emergency nature of the Drought situation, we need to know by _____ C.O.B. if any interested permittees, State and local agencies and interested parties will be attending a drought assessment field tour.
8. Based on the findings from the Drought Indicator Checklist several possible actions could be taken. Examples could include:
 - a. Developing alternative management practices.
 - b. Contacting State and Federal Agencies involved in land management.
 - __c. __Emergency removal of burros
 - d. Partial or complete livestock closures
 - e. Voluntary livestock removal or non use